

These guidelines are the result of discussions with representatives of school districts in Montana with significant populations of English Learner (EL) students. School districts need to have a process for identifying the EL students in their schools that all instructional and counseling staff understand. Serving EL students is funded with a formula grant administered by the Office of Public Instruction (OPI); districts receive funding based on the numbers of EL students identified in their districts. Additionally, an annual assessment of EL students in the four domains of listening, speaking, reading and writing is required in ESEA Title I. As of spring 2001, statewide assessment results have been disaggregated based on limited English proficiency and other categories. Both for this purpose and in to provide appropriate accommodations, it's important to be clear on criteria for identifying students as EL.

Montana observes the following federal definition of English learner: the term "English learner," when used with respect to an individual, means an individual –

- (A) who is aged 3 through 21
- (B) who is enrolled or preparing to enroll in an elementary or secondary; AND
- (C) (i) who was not born in the United States or whose native language is a language other than English; or
(ii) who is a Native American or Alaska Native, or a native of the outlying areas; and who comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on the individual's level of English language proficiency; or
(iii) who is migratory, whose native language is a language other than English, and who comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant AND
- (D) Whose difficulties in speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language may be sufficient to deny the individual
 - (i) the ability to meet the challenging State academic standards
 - (ii) the ability to successfully achieve in classrooms where the language of instruction is English; or
 - (iii) the opportunity to participate fully in society (ESEA Section 8101(20))

It is important to note that the definition addresses both language and academic achievement. While language impact affects entire communities, academic achievement varies from student to student. EL students are those students who are not achieving academically due to the level of their English language proficiency. The guidelines represent a summary of acceptable practices that districts may use in establishing their processes. The process may vary within districts depending on the level of English proficiency of the students (e.g., a newly-arrived immigrant student or a fourth-grade Native American student).

Given that reading comprehension depends on the language knowledge that a reader brings to the process of reading, which involves much more than decoding (in fact, EL students are often very good at decoding, while not comprehending well), it is useful to look at assessment of reading comprehension. In order to avoid the pitfalls of a one-time assessment, particularly for more proficient students, an on-going check of English proficiency that involves multiple measures, such as comprehension, writing, and reading is appropriate.

Keeping in mind that both language of impact (language other than English) and achievement must be considered. **In accordance with [state](#) and [federal](#) law, a district process must include the following steps:**

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| FALL | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The approved Home Language Survey is given to every student at the time of enrollment. <input type="checkbox"/> District Screens potential ELs within 14 days of enrollment using an approved WIDA screener. <input type="checkbox"/> Newly identified students AND transfer students are marked correctly in AIM. <input type="checkbox"/> Parents of newly identified ELs receive an EL designation and placement letter within the first 30 days of enrollment <input type="checkbox"/> ALL EL STUDENTS should be marked in AIM with the primary home language and language of impact by October count date. |
| WINTER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> All identified ELs are administered the ACCESS for ELLs during the test window. |
| SPRING | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Annual EL review meeting is conducted, and parents are invited. <input type="checkbox"/> ELs are retained or reclassified based on MT proficiency criteria. <input type="checkbox"/> ACCESS for ELLs results reports are sent home to parents. |
| SUMMER | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> AIM is updated for students who have been exited by June 30th. |
| NON-NEGOTIABLES OF IDENTIFICATION | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Home Language Survey is given to all students who enroll in the district. <input type="checkbox"/> Must screen with a WIDA English language proficiency screener. <input type="checkbox"/> Identification must be based on Montana's proficiency criteria. |

The EL identification process should include appropriate measures at varying grade levels (i.e., the process for identifying kindergarten students will be different for those in upper grades). Districts can utilize classroom procedures in place to develop a balanced process that encompasses elements listed above.

Montana's Definition of *Proficient* for EL Students

To determine when EL students become proficient, districts must consider multiple measures which include:

- At a minimum, attaining a minimum proficiency level of 4.7 on the overall composite score on the ACCESS for ELLs English language proficiency assessment or P2 on the Alternate ACCESS for ELLS English language proficiency assessment.
- Input from additional measures of reading, writing, or language development available from school assessments.

This guidance is based on input from school district staff members that serve EL students across the state, a review of practices in other states, and input from psychometricians. It is important for districts to review the results of the ACCESS for ELLs assessment and take them into consideration to update AIM to reflect accurate student EL status.